

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BUENOS 02238 281542Z

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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5844

INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS

AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 2238

CARACAS FOR SECRETARY SHULTZ

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, ESTC, EGEN, AR, CU

SUBJ: FOREIGN MINISTER'S VIEWS ON CUBA

1. DURING INITIAL COURTESY CALL BY AMBASSADOR ON ARGENTINE MIN OF ECONOMY JOSE GELBARD, WHO RECENTLY LED ARGENTINE COMMERCIAL DELEGATION TO CUBA, MINISTER MADE INTERESTING OBSERVATIONS ON THE CARIBBEAN ISLAND AS FOLLOWS:

2. GELBARD WAS SURPRISED TO FIND CASTRO RELAXED, FRIENDLY AND NON-AGGRESSIVE, CONTRARY TO THE IMAGE THE MINISTER HAD OF THE CUBAN LEADER AS A DYNAMIC AND AGGRESSIVE PERSON.

3. WHEN AN ARGENTINE REPORTER WHO WAS ACCOMPANYING THE GELBARD MISSION ASKED CASTRO ABOUT THE SITUATION OF THE GUANTANAMO NAVAL BASE, CASTRO RESPONDED IN A CASUAL WAY THAT THIS WAS AN OLD PROBLEM WHICH CUBA WAS IN NO HURRY TO RESOLVE. HE SAID THAT SOME DAY THE BASE AREA WOULD BE RETURNED TO CUBA AS A RESULT OF NEGOTIATIONS. GELBARD RECEIVED THE IMPRESSION FROM THE WAY THE CUBANS TALKED THAT THEY EXPECT RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES TO BE NORMALIZED SOON.

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PAGE 02 BUENOS 02238 281542Z

4. GELBARD SAID THAT IN HIS OPINION THE PEOPLE WERE SOLIDLY

BEHIND CASTRO AND SEEMED TO RESENT ANTI-CASTRO EXPRESSIONS MADE BY VISITORS. WITH RESPECT TO UNITED STATES/CUBAN RELATIONS, GELBARD FELT THAT THE UNITED STATES' EMBARGO AGAINST CUBA HAD BEEN USED BY CASTRO TO FAN ANTI-US SENTIMENT. GELBARD THOUGHT THAT THE REMOVAL OF THE EMBARGO WOULD DEPRIVE CASTRO OF HIS MOST EFFECTIVE ANTI-US ARGUMENT.

5. GELBARD WAS SURPRISED AT THE NUMBER OF CANADIAN TOURISTS IN HAVANA. HE SAID THE HOTELS WERE FILLED WITH THEM. AT ONE TIME A CUBAN OFFICIAL INQUIRED WHETHER ARGENTINA COULD SELL CUBA SEA-GOING PLEASURE BOATS. THE ARGENTINES SAID THAT THEY COULD NOT IF THE BOATS WERE TO BE ARMED AND USED FOR MILITARY PURPOSES. THE CUBANS EXPLAINED THAT THEY WANTED TO OUTFIT THEM AS DEEP SEA FISHING BOATS BECAUSE OF THE GREAT INTEREST AMONG CANADIAN SPORTS FISHERMEN TO GO TO CUBA TO CATCH SWORD-FISH. MINISTER GELBARD SAID THAT TO UNDERSTAND CUBA ONE MUST REALIZE THAT IT IS A POOR AND SMALL COUNTRY AND THAT IT LIVES UNDER THIS PSYCHOSIS. AT ONE POINT IN HIS CONVERSATION, THE CUBAN LEADER SAID THAT ARGENTINA IS A BIG COUNTRY AND COULD, THEREFORE, TALK OF INDEPENDENCE. CUBA AT ONE TIME USED TO DEPEND ON THE UNITED STATES. NOW THINGS ARE DIFFERENT AND IT DEPENDS ON THE USSR, BUT IT STILL "DEPENDS".

6. FULL MEMCON FORWARDED DEPARTMENT BY POUCH.
HILL

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